



UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA

# IFAS EXTENSION

**Friday's Feature**

**By**

**Theresa Friday**

November 20, 2006

## **Overwintering tropical plants means a move indoors**

Many tropical and subtropical plants are grown in containers in our area. Plant species such as tropical Hibiscus, Schefflera, citrus, crotons and Datura are very tender. When nighttime temperatures drop into the 50's, it's time to move these plants inside to protect them from "chilling injury".

Tropical plants thrive in the heat but cannot survive freezing temperatures. This means they must be protected during the winter months. For most gardeners, unless you have a greenhouse, it means moving them indoors or in the garage.

Before you start this tedious task, you need to decide which plants you really want to protect. You may have a few plants that are readily available and inexpensive to buy. For those plants that are easily replaced, you may find it simpler and kinder to your back, to buy new plants in the spring instead of committing to caring for them all winter long.

For those plants that you do decide to overwinter, begin by getting them use to a reduced amount of light. One of the most difficult adjustments they encounter when brought inside, is the reduction of light. To help with the transition to lower light, it's a good idea to move the plants to a very shaded location outside a couple of weeks before you move them indoors. The better you acclimate them, and the more light you are able to provide them indoors, generally mean less leaf drop.

When you do bring them indoors, place them in your brightest room. Try to provide them the most light by placing plants within four feet of an east, west or south facing window.

During our periods of warmer weather, consider moving them outside. A few days outside, if the weather allows, can be refreshing - but only if you are vigilant. Forgetting to move them back indoors before a freeze can be disastrous.

Once plants are moved indoors, watering is very important. Generally you will water less frequently, However, how much less is something you will have to determine. Feel the soil regularly with your finger. Water when the soil feels dry but before the plants wilt. Remember, it is better to water less often than to water too often and cause rot.

Keep in mind that tropical plants do not appreciate being watered with cold water. In some cases, cold water can actually damage a tropical plant. For example, cold water causes spots on African violet leaves. When filling your watering can, be sure to use barely warm or tepid water.

In most cases, the plants you bring in for the winter will not need to be fertilized. Usually, they slow down or stop any new growth and enter a dormant or semi-dormant state. Heavy applications of fertilizer during mid-winter would be wasted, and might lead to root injury.

You also need to do a good, thorough job of pest control before you bring container plants inside. Remove all snails and slugs from the bottom of the pots. Inspect the plants for aphids, spider mites and mealybugs. If your plants are infested, treat them with horticultural oil prior to their move indoors.

Finally, be on the lookout for hitchhikers like frogs and lizards. These beneficial animals should be carefully removed and released outside unharmed.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to:  
<http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>.